United Nations A/AC.105/C.2/L.293

General Assembly

Distr.: Limited
4 March 2014

Original: English

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Legal Subcommittee
Fifty-third session
Vienna, 24 March-4 April 2014
Item 14 of the provisional agenda*

Proposal for a renewal of the structure of the agenda and organization of work of the Legal Subcommittee

Working paper submitted by Germany

I. Introduction

1. The present proposal to restructure the agenda of the Legal Subcommittee and to organize the work of the Subcommittee in a phased way aims at the following:

(a) Maintaining and strengthening the Legal Subcommittee as the main intergovernmental forum to develop space law;

(b) Maintaining and making more efficient use of a period of two weeks for the session for the Subcommittee;

(c) Providing all Member States with better opportunities to raise and deal with matters of concern and provide more flexible and substantive mechanisms to do so.

2. It is therefore proposed to simplify the agenda structure and to establish a two-phased approach to the two-week session of the Subcommittee.

II. Restructuring the agenda

3. The Legal Subcommittee has made better progress in its work since the current agenda structure was established in 1999 following a period of very slow progress. This has been achieved, in particular, through the establishment of workplans and a

* A/AC.105/C.2/L.292.

V.14-01435 (E)

Please recycle

more flexible way of having single issues/items for discussion. However, the current status is that the agenda is neither reactive nor dynamic. Indeed, the interest in discussing more thoroughly the status and application of non-binding instruments and cooperation mechanisms shows the need to accommodate such discussion, to a greater extent even than the recently established workplans.

4. The positive experience with the agenda item on the status and application of the five United Nations treaties on outer space should promote the creation of a parallel standing agenda item on non-binding instruments, with the establishment of an associated permanent working group. A number of current agenda items could be incorporated under these two agenda items, which would provide an opportunity to integrate less productive agenda items.

5. The new agenda would therefore comprise as permanent items:

Item 1. General exchange of views including perspectives of further development of space law.

Item 2. Status and application of the five United Nations treaties on outer space and other legally binding instruments, including national space legislation, by States and international intergovernmental organizations (working group).

Item 3. Status and application of the non-binding instruments developed in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and other non-binding legal instruments relevant to outer space by States and international intergovernmental organizations (working group).

Item 4. Capacity-building in space law and information on activities of international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

6. In addition, one workplan remains on the agenda until it expires in 2017 and one item is so far foreseen as a single issue/item in 2014:

Item 5. Review of international mechanisms for cooperation in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space.

Item 6. National measures to implement non-legally binding instruments for outer space activities.

7. The restructuring of the agenda, tracked to show the inclusion of the current agenda items, is set out below:

Item 1. General exchange of views, including perspectives with regard to further development of space law:

(a) The general exchange of views should not repeat positions, which will be presented in the working groups. It should deal with overall issues and, in particular, with the views of delegations on the progressive development of space law;

(b) The general exchange of views would be scheduled for full days on both Mondays of the session, thus providing the equivalent time as in the current structure;

(c) Discussions of the work of the working groups in plenary would take place on Thursday and the report would be adopted on Friday during the second week.

Item 2. Status and application of the five United Nations treaties on outer space by States and international intergovernmental organizations:

(a) The work would be conducted in a permanent working group, chaired by a suitable candidate taking into consideration the current Chair (Belgium) of the Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties on Outer Space;

(b) The item would incorporate the 2013 agenda items of the Legal Subcommittee on national legislation relevant to the peaceful exploration and use of outer space, and on the examination and review of the developments concerning the Protocol to the Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment on Matters Specific to Space Assets.

Item 3. Status and application of the non-binding instruments developed in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and other legal instruments relevant to outer space by States and international intergovernmental organizations:

(a) The work would be conducted in a permanent working group, chaired by a suitable candidate taking into consideration the current Chair (Brazil) of the Working Group on Matters Relating to the Definition and Delimitation of Outer Space;

(b) The item would incorporate the 2013 agenda items of the Legal Subcommittee on the review and possible revision of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space, and on the general exchange of information and views on legal mechanisms relating to space debris mitigation measures, taking into account the work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee;

(c) The item would also incorporate the agenda item of the Legal Subcommittee on matters relating to: (a) the definition and delimitation of outer space, and (b) the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit, including consideration of ways and means to ensure the rational and equitable use of the geostationary orbit without prejudice to the role of the International Telecommunication Union, and the work of the Working Group on Matters Relating to the Definition and Delimitation of Outer Space;

(d) The item would later incorporate the results of the agenda items of the Legal Subcommittee on the review of international mechanisms for cooperation in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space, and the general exchange of information on non-legally binding United Nations instruments on outer space, following their completion in 2017 and 2014 respectively.

8. The two working groups to be established would organize their work in a way that would allow member States of the Committee to raise issues and propose formats for deliberating on them. It would facilitate the discussion of new items and would avoid a cumbersome process for setting the agenda. It would also reduce the need to put issues into workplans, which are not suited for such an approach, thus avoiding the creation of workplans with a rather schematic sequence of providing information in the first year, discussion in the second year and conclusions in the third year. Under this concept, the current method of single issues/items for discussion would be equivalent to deliberations on an issue for only one year in a working or expert group.

9. The full benefit of such a new structure can be achieved through a new, phased approach for the two-week period of the session of the Legal Subcommittee as proposed in the following section.

III. Phased approach for the two-week session of the Legal Subcommittee

10. The present proposal maintains a two-week session for the Legal Subcommittee. All activities during these two weeks (plenary exchanges, expert groups and working groups) are an integral part of the Subcommittee and therefore all deliberations take place at the level of delegations (represented by experts and/or by governmental representatives).

11. The current sessions of the Legal Subcommittee experience and suffer (much more than the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space) from a strong participation during the first two days and the last two days of the session, but low participation in the days in between. In order to intensify and concentrate the exchange of views between governmental representatives it is proposed that:

(a) The first week would be dedicated to expert groups and, on Friday, the symposium organized by the International Institute of Space Law (IISL) and the European Centre for Space Law (ECSL);

(b) The second week would be dedicated to the formal deliberations of representatives of member States of the Committee.

12. During the second week, the deliberations of member States would follow the new agenda structure as outlined above. The two permanent working groups would discuss issues that have been previously identified and would, for the purpose of having substantive debates, set up expert groups, which would prepare the discussion of items in the working groups. These expert groups could be set up in a similar way to the expert groups established under the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee Working Group on the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (see A/66/20, annex II).

13. These expert groups would:

(a) Work during the first week based on a precise and exact mandate from the working groups;

(b) Be composed of experts nominated by member States of the Committee (including persons from non-governmental institutions but accredited as members of delegations); members of delegations may also participate in the expert group meetings as observers;

(c) Work under the guidance of a chair nominated by the respective working group;

(d) Include, as appropriate, experts from the scientific and technical field, thus potentially linking the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Legal Subcommittee (the link between the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the expert groups could also be accommodated by, for example, inviting the chairs of

the working groups of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in their respective capacities to provide inputs to the expert groups);

(e) Be able also to communicate intersessionally, as appropriate;

(f) Prepare a report (maximum four pages long), which will be a compilation by the chair of the views expressed and will be brought to the attention of the respective working groups.

14. The number of expert groups should be four at the outset, but could change upon a decision by the Legal Subcommittee.

15. The use of expert groups and action teams has already been successfully applied in the Committee, not only for the item on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, but also for the items on near-Earth objects and use of nuclear power sources in outer space.

16. One half-day meeting for each expert group would be held separately with translation services. The schedule would also allow smaller delegations to follow all the expert groups.

17. The reports of the expert groups should be ready for processing at the latest by Thursday afternoon of the first week. Deliberations on them will start at the earliest on Tuesday afternoon of the second week, which provides room for editing and translation.

18. Since the requirements for the Secretariat will be high in preparing the expert group reports for the second week, facilitations for the Secretariat could be foreseen, for example by streamlining the report of the Legal Subcommittee, omitting separate annexed reports by the working groups and having only one, integrated report (including expert group reports and working group decisions of around two pages each) of around 25 pages.

19. A generic schedule for the first week would look as follows:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
a.m.	Opening of the session and general exchange of views, including perspectives of further development of space law	Expert group 1	Expert group 3	Expert groups 1 and 2, one after the other, to finalize their reports	IISL/ECSL symposium
p.m.	General exchange of views, including perspectives of further development of space law	Expert group 2	Expert group 4	Expert groups 3 and 4, one after the other, to finalize their reports	IISL/ECSL symposium

20. A generic schedule for the second week would look as follows:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
a.m.	General exchange of views, including perspectives of further development of space law	Working group 1	Working group 2	Capacity-building and other matters	Adoption of the report of the Legal Subcommittee
p.m.	General exchange of views, including perspectives of further development of space law	Working group 1	Working group 2	Adoption of decisions of working groups 1 and 2, one after the other	Adoption of the report of the Legal Subcommittee

21. If adopted in 2014, this new approach could be implemented from 2016 onwards, in that in 2015 the first set of expert groups would be established, which would report in 2016 to the two working groups. The session in 2015 would follow current arrangements but would identify the first set of topics for the expert groups. This timeline would also provide the opportunity to reflect potential issues to be taken up from the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee item on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

IV. Summary

22. The advantage of this model, to be decided in 2014 and to be implemented from 2016 (based on a decision in 2015 on issues for 2016), combined with the new agenda structure would be:

(a) A more flexible way of taking up issues of concern to delegations;

(b) A more substantive debate based on expert preparation;

(c) A better insight into the issues for, in particular, smaller delegations with less resources, since they benefit from the preparatory work of the expert groups, which they can also follow;

(d) A stronger reflection of scientific and technical aspects, integrated into the preparations;

(e) A more intensified debate in the deliberations of member States as a result of a more concentrated meeting period;

(f) A more thorough and adapted use of meeting time without reducing the session period.